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A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE EARLY HISTORY OF GUELPH.

BY ROBERT THOMPSON,

A FIRST YEAR'S SETTLER.

In the spring of 1825, my father, with his family, came to reside in the Town of Galt. He purchased a lot on the west side of the Grand River, and erected a house where we resided for about two years. Galt was at that time a place of about 70 to 80 inhabitants, with one store, one tavern, grist and saw mill, a cooper's shop, a distillery, and about ten dwelling-houses. On the morning of the 22nd of April, 1827, my attention was arrested by a small group of men and ox teams on the opposite side of the river. I was then a boy of about ten years, and possessing, as I believed I did, a fair share of full-fledged curiosity in seeing and knowing all that was going on around me, I hastened to the spot, and very soon gathered from the conversation that the party was preparing to start for a place they called the Block, somewhere east of the Township of Waterloo. So far as memory serves me the party were as follows:—Mr. Galt, Dr. Dunlop, Charles Prior, John McDonald (late Sheriff of Goderich), William Goodin, of Galt, and some eight or ten axe men and chain bearers—four of whom I knew—as Harry and Curtis Lambert, Stace, and Ira Holdin, all residing in or near Galt. The teams belonged to Absalom Shade, and were loaded with pork, flour, whiskey, etc. The easterly part of Waterloo through which they had to pass was at that time but thinly settled, and only one settler in the entire Township of Guelph; this was a man named Rife, who had about two years previous squatted near the westerly limits of the Township, about five and a half miles from the town; the creek running through his farm is still known as Rife's Creek. The distance to be travelled from Galt was about seventeen miles, and for the most part was over a rough and newly-made bush road. The cortege left Galt at eight o'clock in the morning, and reached their destination about five o'clock in the afternoon. As many of the more favoured of the party as could be accommodated took shelter for the night in a log shanty which had been erected a few days previous by the Surveyors; the remainder as best they could, some under the waggons, and some in wigwams covered with the branches of trees.

The shanty stood about thirty yards north of where the Grand Trunk Railway Passenger Station now stands. As the story ran they had a grand jollification that night; what was lacking in domestic comfort was more than made up by convivial cheer—for if they were na fou they just had plenty.

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Mr. Galt in manner was a man of more than ordinary refinement, and in size considerably above the average of men. The Doctor was but very little above the average size ; but in manner a man of very different type. Though liberal, kind, and generous at heart, he was gruff and uncouth in manner, and withal was very eccentric. An incident in this connection may perhaps be worth relating :—At early dawn next morning Mr. Galt, in making his way out of the dark shanty, by mistake happened to tread on the Doctor's shins, whereupon he was greatly incensed, and roared out at the top of his voice, "Can ye na keep off folk's shins, ye great muckle brute." On the morning of the 23rd the party proceeded to the spot where stood the Historic Tree ; it was a large bird's-eye or sugar-maple, about two feet in diameter. It was soon cut down by the axe men, Mr. Galt and the Doctor giving it a few blows before falling. On the centre of this stump the surveyor, John McDonald, planted his compass staff, and declared it to be the centre of the city prospective ; but a very serious difficulty presented itself at this juncture. This tree stood near the banks of the River Speed, which formed the extreme eastern limits of the plot or hillock set apart as the site proper for the town ; and how to fix the centre and circumference on one and the same spot was a problem very difficult to solve. The Doctor, however, was quite equal to the emergency, and at once suggested the ladies' fan, to which all present gave hearty consent. The stump was afterwards fenced round, neatly levelled and dressed on the top, and a sun-dial placed on it, which answered as the town clock for several years.

Ready employment and remunerative wages soon brought reinforcements of craftsmen of various kinds to the place, inasmuch that great inconvenience was experienced for a time in finding even temporary accommodation for the workmen and their families. The first three months were mainly occupied in clearing up the land and erecting log houses in different parts of the town. Four of these original structures are still standing. Two of them may be seen on Waterloo street—one opposite the planing-mill of Mercer & Casey, and the other on the premises of F. W. Stone, Esq.

This one was the first blacksmith shop, and was occupied by John Lynch, father of our respected townsman, James Lynch, and who is entitled to the honour of being the first of the old settlers now living in the town. The house at present occupied by Dr. Herod, on Quebec street, was erected the same year by Mr. Prior—intended as a residence for himself, but never was occupied by him. It is still sound and in good condition, and likely to last for one hundred years longer ; unlike the other three buildings it was of squared or hewn logs.

And last, the house occupied by D. Allan, Esq., on the bank of the Speed, known as the Priory. This house is above the average size and quality of log houses.

The main building is about fifty by thirty feet, with a wing or lean-to at each end, which was all finished in first-class style in 1828. It was originally intended as general headquarters for the company's employees, and was also the residence of Mr. Galt for some time previous to his being recalled. The south wing, while in an unfinished state, was set apart as a tavern, and occupied by a Mr. Reid, who also acted as Postmaster *pro tem*.

Early in July an opening celebration was mooted, and finally the King's birthday was fixed upon for the occasion. All hands were soon set to work in making the necessary preparations.

A large frame building to be called a market house was soon in course of erection, and was to be used on the occasion as a place of amusement and festivity. In view of the coming event another tavern was also soon in course of erection.

This building stood on the south side of east Market Square, nearly opposite the Royal Hotel, and was kept by one Philip Jones. Absalom Shade had by this time finished his contract of cutting and clearing what was then called the Broad Road, now Waterloo Road, extending from the

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Waterloo line to the town, a distance of six miles. He soon after commenced another contract of chopping and clearing the road through the Township of Puslinch or Clergy Reserve. The Company, with but few exceptions, were then getting all their supplies from Mr. Shade, viz., pork, flour, whiskey, etc., etc., so that teams were almost daily on the road from Galt. By this means the writer was enabled to work his way for the first time to the new town. My father and brother being here at the time was an additional inducement to me to visit the place of so much notoriety. The King's birthday happening to fall on Sunday the celebration must necessarily come off on Monday the 13th, but Sunday did not prove a day of rest. The new market house was only about half shingled. The ox had to be dressed and made ready for the roast, and various other little preliminaries preparatory to the occasion. The day came, and visitors from various parts began to flock in. The band from "Little York," now Toronto, was in attendance. Mr. Gurnett, of Ancaster, editor of the *Gore Gazette*, was present, and had quite a lengthy article in his next issue.

Waterloo, Galt, Eramosa, and Woolwich were all represented. About five hundred strangers in all were present early in the morning. The dressed ox had been placed on a windlass in front of a burning log pile and turned as on a spit for about six hours. He was then cut in pieces and served up. Two pot-ash kettles of potatoes were by this time also ready for serving up, together with plenty of bread, hemlock tea, and whiskey. The entire company were supplied with a plain but sumptuous dinner; the only attempt at ornamentation being the head and horns of the bullock placed on a large side dish at the head of one of the tables. All were satisfied that the ox had been roasted whole, but very few of those who partook believed that the whole of the ox was roasted.

Next on the programme was the ceremony of laying the foundation stone of the two first stone buildings in the town. One of these was intended for a bank. It was located on or about the spot where the Grand Trunk Passenger Station now stands. It was finished in the spring of 1828, and used for some months as an office by some of the Canada Company's clerks. The property was subsequently purchased from the Company by the late Dr. Alling. This building was afterwards demolished in order to make room for a large two-story brick dwelling. This was likewise demolished to make room for the station-house. The other referred to was a school-house located a few chains further to the east. Mr. David Matthews was the teacher in this house for the first ten or fifteen years. It was also used as a meeting-house or church by the various religious denominations for several years after its erection. The amusements of the day were various and diversified. The only thing that attracted much attention was the firing of wooden cannon. These were made of beech and maple logs about two feet in length and one foot in diameter, with a two-inch bore, and bound with three strong iron bands, generally bursting after the first or second shot. A few fights brought the day's proceedings to a close, and the crowd generally dispersed. Some, however, of the more aristocratic remained for the evening. A ball and supper was to come off in the Priory. The tables were spread in the main building, as yet in an unfinished state. From sixty to eighty sat down to a sumptuous supper, Mr. Galt at the head of the table and the old Doctor acting as Vice. What followed the removing of the cloth may be easier imagined than described. Suffice it to say the night drove on with songs and clatter, and aye the grog was growing better. The ball was led off by Mr. Galt and Mrs. Leaden. Farther on in the evening, however, a row ensued, and one Thomas Brown, acting as Constable *pro tem.*, while endeavoring to restore peace, had one of his hands badly cut by a carving knife in the hands of one of the rioters. Brown was in consequence appointed Grog Boss among the company's workmen. This Brown was father of the first child born in the town. Letitia Brown, infant, was the grantee of a house and lot as a free grant from the Canada Company prom-

ised to the first born in the town. The lot referred to is eighty-five on Quebec street.

A brisk business in building continued during the remaining part of the season. The buildings, however, were for the most part of a somewhat different class from those erected in the early part of the season. A frame store was erected and kept by the firm of Gilkison & Leaden. It stood where the produce store now stands on East Market Square, near the Grand Trunk Station.

A saw-mill was erected by the same firm on the site where the People's Mills now stands. Jenkins & Oliver built a stone store just opposite the first mentioned on the north-west side of the Square.

From some cause or other unknown to the writer the business carried on by this firm was of short duration, lasting only some four or five months. Several frame buildings were erected along the northerly side of the Square. One of these belonged to Mr. James McQuillan, now residing a short distance from town, and father of the enterprising owners of McQuillan's Block on Wyndham street. Early in the spring of 1828 two other stores were opened on the south side of Upper Market Square—one by Thomas McVane, who occupied a log house opposite the drill shed; the other was a frame building a little further eastward, with one Charles McCrae as its proprietor.

The day book, now my property, was the one used in the establishment at the time. By the index it would appear that he had the names of about eighty of his customers in his books, which comprised nearly if not quite all the adult male portion of the inhabitants then in the town.

This book is at the disposal of any who might be curious enough to know what the average price of whiskey in Guelph was fifty years ago. Though the winter of 1827-8 was unusually mild, little was done in the way of building houses.

Quite a number, however, of the company's workmen were retained and employed during the winter in opening and extending the roads leading into the town.

Early in spring the work was resumed under the management of a new foreman—a young Englishman named Strickland, who had been in the country for a few years, and professing to have had some practical experience in new country life.

Mr. Galt first met with him in Toronto, and was so favourably impressed with his abilities, together with some satisfactory recommendations, that he brought him to Guelph on trial, and finally gave him the entire management of the company's works, which consisted mainly for a few months in bridge building and other general improvements.

By this time the town had assumed such proportions that it was deemed desirable to hold semi-annual fairs. So the first Mondays in May and November were the days named.

The first May Fair in Guelph was a day long to be remembered. The show of stock, however, was something very different from what was exhibited at our last Easter Fair. Three cows and two yoke of oxen comprised the entire stock on the ground.

It was a rare thing in those days for gatherings of this sort to pass off without a few fights. On this occasion it was Irishmen pitted against Yankees. Two brothers named Sullivan appear to have been the principal actors on the Yankee side. A row commenced at a newly-opened tavern called the "Horn of Plenty," kept by one Charles McTague, resulting very unfavourably for the poor Yankees. As soon as that affray was over one of the bystanders hurried off up town to Jones' tavern, where a number of Irishmen were collected, and told them that the Yankees had gouged out a bushel of Irishmen's eyes. This, of course, was the signal for a general onslaught upon the perpetrators. The Yankees, only about half a dozen in number, perceiving that the odds were against them, and that they were

likely to be again overpowered, fled for refuge in the direction of their boarding-house, with twice their number of Irishmen close at their heels. They succeeded, however, in reaching the house and getting the door closed before their pursuers overtook them. This was a small log house which stood on the lot where Cook's Hotel now stands on Cork street, and kept as a tavern or boarding-house by a man named Yankee Matthews, still living, I believe. The Irishmen, however, were determined not to be foiled, and began to force open the door.

My father happening to be in the house at the time, and perceiving that the Yankees were all armed with axes, and fully determined to use them should the others force an entrance, quietly got out through a small window at the rear end and went round to the crowd in front, assuring them that murder would surely be committed if they persisted in entering the house, and finally succeeded in persuading them to leave, still vowing vengeance on all the Yankees they could find in town.

Mr. Shade, from Galt, who was well known to be a Yankee, was in town, but took the precaution of keeping out of the way. He rode a very fine horse, and put up at Jones' Hotel.

Now it was verily believed that the poor animal was suspected of being Yankee, too, from the fact that in the morning when it was brought out of the stable it was minus the tail.

An action for damages was instituted against Jones, resulting in a verdict for the plaintiff for sixty dollars and costs. Jones left soon after, and was succeeded by a man named Vanhoutin.

Quite a number of emigrants came in during the early part of the summer. Among them were some eight or ten families from Paisley in Scotland.

The majority of these were temporarily quartered in a large log house newly erected for Dr. Dunlop. This house stood on the south bank of the River Speed, a little north-east of the new English Church. It was demolished only some eight or ten years ago. Doctor Dunlop took these Paisley bodies, as he was pleased to call them, under his special charge, and took an interest in selecting farms for them, etc. Some of them, I believe, were among the first settlers in that part of the township known as the Paisley Block. He also acted as their physician for a time, as it would appear from a little incident related by Mr. Strickland before referred to. This gentleman amused himself occasionally in interviewing the Doctor's eccentricities and relates the following anecdote:—I remember, he says, one time in particular. He came to my office and inquired for me. On being informed by the store porter (Mr. Fielding, father of the present landlord of the Great Western Hotel), that I had just gone out, he said to tell him when he comes back to take the calomel and jalap down to my house and treat those Paisley bodies to a dose apiece. What! all of them, sir? Yes, to be sure. They are but just arrived, and have got as fat as pigs on the voyage, and some of their bacon must be taken off, or with this heat we shall have them all sick on our hands, and tell him not to spare the jalap.

The time was now nearing when the subject of holding another King's birthday celebration must be considered. And the question as to how it was to be observed was of all the most perplexing. Some were in favour of a grand ball and supper; others contended that another ox should be roasted. A few, however, of the more economical, thought there would be far more fun out of a barrel of whiskey than either of the two first mentioned. The vote being taken, it was found that whiskey had a large majority. So on the morning of the 12th a barrel of whiskey was rolled out and placed in the market-house, and notwithstanding the limited means of advertising in those days a goodly number were in attendance, and, as might be expected, things began to get tolerably lively towards evening. The proceedings were brought to a close by a grand concert, as quite a number of the more devoted lingered around the much-loved spot and were seen at a late hour sitting

in ranges along the steps of the market-house singing heartily, "We Won't Go Home Till Morning."

The 12th day of August, 1829, was again observed for the last time in Guelph, the only demonstration being the firing off of as many of the old muskets as could be collected in the neighbourhood.

I wish now to return briefly to the history of the Post office. On Reid's removal from the Priory, in the spring of 1828, the appointment was transferred to a Mr. Hume, who was at that time residing in the stone store referred to, built by Jenkins & Oliver, on lot No. 1, a little west of the station. Hume died in 1832, but his widow still retained the office. The duties, however, in those days were very light, as there was but one mail a week to the town for the first three years. A change in the ownership of the property soon after necessitated another removal. It was next located in a small frame house on Macdonnell street, near or about its intersection with Sandilands street, in rear of Carter's store. Mrs. Hume was sister to Thomas B. Husband, a Clerk in the Canada Company's employ for nearly two years, but left here to reside in the city of Rochester in 1829. He was a gentleman of considerable ability, and has for many years, and still is, I believe, practicing law in that city. It was while Mrs. Hume was in the occupancy of the last mentioned premises that she became the wife of the late Robert Corbet, Esq., whereupon the office was again removed by Mr. Corbet to his own premises on Cork street, the property at present owned and occupied by E. Newton, Esq. On the death of Mrs. Corbet, which was soon after, Mr. Corbett was formally appointed Postmaster in June, 1837, and subsequently married Miss Oliver, daughter of the late James Oliver, Esq., who came from New York with his family to reside in Guelph in 1829. The office was next removed to Mr. Corbet's then newly-erected block, corner of Wyndham and Cork streets, in 1850. He held the appointment of Postmaster until the time of his death, which was in 1861, a period of over twenty-four years. He was a man of correct business habits, and gave general satisfaction as a public officer. His widow is still living, and now resides with her family on Norfolk street.

There were four deaths during the first year, all accidental. The first of these was about the end of July. A brewer or beer pedler named Stephen Tuttle was in town with a load of beer. On his return, and when about three-fourths of a mile down the Waterloo Road, a tree was blown across the waggon, killing him instantly, without injury to either the horse or any part of the waggon, except the box. The next was a man named Chase, who was killed by a falling beam while at a house-raising in the month of November. He was a carpenter by trade, and boarded at Jones' Hotel. Though comparatively a young man, he was very wise—in his way of thinking—wise enough to be a scoffer, and was wont to parade his scepticism occasionally among his fellow-boarders. In conversation the night previous he said to his companions:—"Boys, if you have any messages to hell, I'll take them for you." A man named Turner was killed on the 17th of March, 1828, by a falling tree while out chopping. He had just located on the lot adjoining that now occupied by John Murphy, Esq., known as Mount Tara, formerly known as the Dwyer Farm. The other was a man named Church, who was choked by a piece of beef, on the Good Friday following, while taking his breakfast in Jones' tavern. Turner was buried in South Market Square, a few feet from the west corner of the stone building recently erected for an arsenal. His remains were never exhumed that I am aware of. The other three were taken away for interment by their friends. Macdonnell street was at that time chopped and cleared to the top of Church Hill (as it was then called), and an acre or so slashed, which was intended as a burying ground when cleared. A portion of what is known as the old burying ground was cleared off early in August, and the first one buried was a man named Reid, one of the first year's settlers in the Scotch Block on Elora Road. Two others were interred the day following—

one a Mr. Wallace, father of the Mr. D. Wallace, of the township of Pilkington; the other a man name Thane, from Paisley, Scotland, who died very shortly after his arrival in town.

Horace Perry, of Port Hope, millwright, who had the contract of building the Guelph Mills, arrived in Guelph with a staff of builders and millwrights on the 28th of April, 1830. The mill was up and running on the 10th of December following.

The first Sunday School was opened by Mr. Buchanan, British Consul, in August, 1828, while in Guelph on a visit for a few days from New York. It was in a small log house on South Market Square, owned by the late Benjamin Harrison, who, with his wife, were among the teachers.

The first school teacher in the town was a man named Davis, who opened a private school for a few months towards the end of 1827.

An office for job printing was opened on Waterloo street early in 1828, by a man named Chatterton, existing only some six months.

The Canada Company's offer of a town lot and house for the first weaving done in the town was awarded to the late James Hodgert, Esq., who had a loom running in the winter of 1827-8. This lot is situate on the corner of Quebec street and St. George's Square, lately the property of the Messrs. Heffernan.

The first marriage solemnized was that of Christopher Keough to Miss Ann Green in September, 1827. Mrs. Keough is still living, and resides adjacent to the town.

The first practicing physician in the town was a Doctor Welsh, in 1827.

Thomas Lynch was the first born who is now living in Guelph.

LIST OF THE NAMES OF THE FIRST YEAR'S SETTLERS IN GUELPH STILL LIVING.

Jas. Lynch, Hugh Henry, Robt. Thompson, Jas. McQuillan, Mrs. Jas. McQuillan, Felix Hanlon, Mrs. Michael Allen, Mrs. Ann Keough, D. Stirton, Donald Wallace, Hugh Wallace, Alex. McDonald, Walter McDonald, Alex. Kennedy (teacher), Thos. McBride, Mrs. McBride, John Gillis, Mrs. Charles McTague, Mrs. John McTague, Mrs. Peter McTague, Mrs. Soden, Mrs. Bickiers, Mrs. Tobin, Rory McCrae, Wm. McCrae, Henry Foster, Jas. Benham, Mrs. Macdonald (widow), mother of Alex. Macdonald; Mrs. McCrae (widow), mother of Wm. and Rory McCrae; Wm. Croft, Miss F. Harrison, Mrs. Henry, Alex. Campbell, Thomas Daily.

SECOND YEAR'S SETTLERS.

Wm. McCuen, Saml. McCuen, Mrs. Ar. Mitchell, Mrs. Jane Ritchie, Martin Duley, Isaac Lenix, Mrs. Mannie, William Patterson, Robert Patterson, Mrs. Charles McWilliams, Mrs. Laird (widow), Thomas Lynch, Joseph Margin, Wm. Logan, Arch. McCorkindale, John McCorkindale, John Drew, Jas. Keough, Wm. Benham, Bernard McTague, Sarah McTague, Robert Knowles, Mrs. Fields, Janet McKersie, William McKersie, John McKersie, David McKersie, Gavin McKersie, Robert McKersie.

List of some of those known to have been residents of Guelph in the winter of 1827-8 in addition to those already given or referred to in the narrative:—Chas. Armstrong, D. D. Akins, Chas. Boyington, Thos. Baker,

Chas. Burns, Jach Bilerd, John Clark, James Coleman, Robert Clark, Ed. Carroll, John Clark, James Cornfoot, Daniel Dougan, Wm. Delimore, James Elliott, Robert Elder, John Foster, John Farrell, Wm. Gregg, David Gibbs, Edward Gilmore, Daniel Hill, Louis Howard, John Hall, John Herreld, George Henry, Thomas Johnson, Thomas Kelly, Wm. Kernly, Enoch Kenyon, Uriah Lampart, John Lennox, Thomas Lee, Malcolm Livingston, James McCartney, Michael Mullen, Wm. McCrea, John McDonald, James McGarr, John McLeod, McLaren & Miller, John McNeil, Hugh McDonald, Peter Butchard, Alex. Rose, John Gaffney, John Smith, Geo. Wallace, Alex. Reid, Wm. Johnson, Richard Johnson, Alex. McTavish, J. Oliver, Henry Pennybaker, Thomas Stewart, Thomas Smith, Fenton Molloy, John Barnes, Joseph Milloy, Robert McCuen, John McNulty, James Thompson, John Thompson, John Taft, W. W. Wright, John Wilson, Matthias Wert, James Yates, John Mitchell, Andrew Ritchie.

ROBERT THOMPSON.

ELLENBURN, }
Guelph, April 21st, 1877. }

GUELPH :

Mercury Steam Printing House, Macdonnell Street.

1877.

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